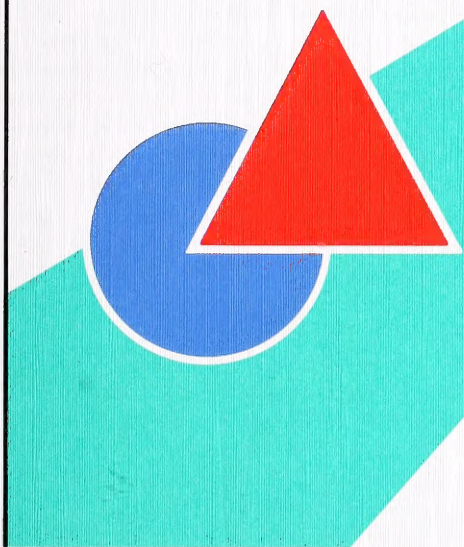


SPIRITAN LIFE



**No° 8
March
1999**

**APOSTOLIC
COMMUNITY
LIFE**

Spiritan Life aims at being a forum for Ongoing Formation and Animation:

- through the shared experiences of confreres,
- through reflection on these experiences,
- through the inspiration of our founders, our tradition and the demands of mission today.

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"The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence. Placed as they are within the world's different societies – societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it – communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that community can bring differences into harmony.

- Vita Consecrata no. 51.

"In a fragmented and individualistic world, community is a witness to evangelical communion. Each one of us is called to integrate his personal journey and apostolate into the Congregation. In doing this, we discover the sense of our vow of obedience: community becomes a special place for discerning the divine will. It is also a corrective challenge to a narrow self-centredness in our work"

- 1998 General Chapter, Maynooth 0.4.3.

“Living Together”

Living together, living in community – there is hardly any General Chapter or Chapter of a circumscription that does not speak about it. And every time, quoting Libermann, there is a reminder that community life is an integral part of our spiritan life!

The Maynooth Chapter was no exception. It insisted, in a most explicit way, that all circumscriptions “*will place a strong emphasis on programmes of renewal, to revitalize and ensure the authenticity of our community life*”; it called on all Spiritans to practise it and all provincial Administrations and local Superiors to make its implementation a priority. It is not a question of just any sort of community; “*a quality of presence, of communication and sharing is called for*”.

We can never be content with beautiful statements of intent; we would justly be accused of naivete, or even hypocrisy if concrete achievements did not result from such noble intentions. This is the aim we have in mind with this edition of *Spiritan Life*”; to show that it is possible to live out a genuine community life and not just settle for sharing the same roof and table; to illustrate, from the lived experience of our confreres, that it is not just an impossible dream to imagine a shared life that is based on deep human friendship, a desire to share our work and everything else we hold dear, even going as far as sharing our common faith!

The various contributions that follow include examples of how genuine spiritan community life is being lived out in different parts of the world. Even the most sceptical will have to admit that community life for us is alive and well, that it is sought by both young and old, and that those who give themselves generously to this ideal receive in return a great deal of joy, support and dynamism in their apostolic work. As you would expect from Spiritans, the testimonies are nothing if not realistic; nearly all the writers stress that community life does not come easily, that success in community-building depends on the constant efforts of each individual member. There is no such thing as a perfect community; it needs constant attention, it needs to be remodeled with each arrival and each departure. There is nothing permanent about it.

Put simply, we should try to create an authentic family life in our communities, where each member is equally important, where all are loved and cherished for themselves, where there is an atmosphere of true freedom, where each has his unique place, is recognized, accepted and, if needs be, supported.

What can one say of the witness-value of our communities, especially when they are international? From what our confreres tell us, in the current climate of egoism, war, exclusion of the weak or those who do not fit in, the presence of a loving-community of people who differ enormously in their background, education and origins can be the most striking way of announcing the Good News of the Gospel. If such diverse people are able to live together like this as brothers, then logically one must conclude that they all have the same Father! What better way to share with others the real nature of our God as a loving Father.

We hope you will enjoy reading about the experiences of our confreres and the reflective articles that go with them. Our hope is that what they have to say will spark off reactions from others, giving rise to an exchange of ideas, experiences, questions and even gentlemanly disagreements! In this way, *Spiritan Life* could develop into a sort of an on-going forum that could focus our reflections on different aspects of our life and work – this edition is about community living, the next will be about “Presence and Solidarity”, characteristics of our present-day apostolate identified by Maynooth. If there is sufficient reaction, we can devote a section of each number to your responses to the ideas and experiences expressed in the previous edition. *Spiritan Life* could give us the chance to share at the level of the Congregation just as is done (we hope!) in our communities. It is up to you, dear reader!

The Editorial Team

LIBERMANN'S IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

By Vincent O'Toole c.s.sp.

The Chapter at Maynooth once again reminded us of the centrality of community life in the vision of Libermann for his new religious family. In his latter years, it became almost an obsession with him as he saw many confreres being carried away from this ideal with the excuse of the overwhelming needs of the apostolate. Vincent O'Toole of the English Province, currently working at the Generalate, is struck by the contrast between Libermann's dream and the present reality, as seen through some recent visitation reports, and wonders if perhaps we are now running out of excuses.

Looking recently through the Generalate visitation reports on various spiritan circumscriptions, made during the last five years, I could not help wondering how Francis Libermann would react to our present approach to community living. Remarks like "*many confrères are living alone*" are surprisingly frequent for a religious family that has chosen "*life in community as its founding principle*" (SRL 27).

Not for one moment do I think he would have been judgmental; he would probably have been the first to sympathise with the effects of the inevitable tug-of-war resulting from his decision to make us both missionaries and religious. For in one sense, he designed a Congregation for a situation that was rapidly overtaken by events. When he wrote the *Règlements* in 1849, to the forefront of his mind must have been the French island colonies, where there was already a secular clergy in place; Libermann's concept of communities of Spiritans helping in local parishes was tailored to this situation. But the responsibilities given to his disciples by the Church after his death were of an extent and magnitude that he could never have imagined. Spiritans were asked to preach the Gospel from Senegal to the Cape of Good Hope, to evangelise vast areas of East Africa. In these places, there was effectively no local Church; it had to be built from its very foundations. So Libermann's children rapidly grew out of the clothes that he had so carefully designed for them!

But in the wake of another General Chapter, with the growth of so many new Provinces, Foundations, and missionary initiatives, and with the changing needs of local Churches where Spiritans are working, perhaps it is time to look again at the vision and compare it to the present reality.

THE VISION

Libermann's project

Francis Libermann's burning desire, above all else, was to save the souls of the most abandoned and preach the Christian message to those who had never heard it. In the "*Règlements*" of 1849, the rule for the new combined societies, he stressed that it was immaterial whether this work was done by his own Congregation or others: "*They (the Spiritans) will have a sincere respect for other Congregations and their members and they will maintain warm and charitable relations with them. They will be content to see them honoured and loved by everyone, even when they are preferred to their own society.....They will rejoice to see God glorified and souls saved, no matter what instrument has served to work this effect, and this even though the Congregation is to suffer thereby*".¹ So the work to be accomplished is the primary consideration and the reason for the existence of the new foundation.

The means by which the project will be accomplished

One could say that community life was almost an obsession with Libermann, especially in the last years of his life. He seems to have had great fears that its importance for his confrères would diminish as the demands of the apostolate become ever greater. For him, community living is the essential means for bringing the whole project to fruition: "*To bring the apostolic life (for which spiritan life is intended) to its perfection, to assure the continuance and the development of the works in which it engages and to foster the holiness of its members, the Congregation has adopted life in community as its founding principle. Its members shall all live in community at all times*".²

He leaves no doubt as to the importance he attaches to community; he could hardly have stated this fundamental principle in stronger terms. All other subordinate means adopted must be compatible with community life: *"The means which the Congregation employs to attain its main aim are, in general, those which are not opposed to community life and which, by their nature, do not expose its members to the danger of laxity and of losing the spirit that should animate them"*.³

Because of its centrality, because community living will be demanded of all members, a person unable or unwilling to live the common life must not be accepted into the Congregation: *"...Those who have not the necessary dispositions to practice faithfully the rule to live amongst their confrères with the piety and charity that community life demands...are to be sent away"*.⁴ A person does not join this religious family simply as a means to being a missionary; he is allowed to commit himself to the Congregation only on condition that he is ready to live a community life. Bishops must be clear about this when they ask for the services of Spiritans; a Spiritan *"does not make his commitment with a bishop but with the Congregation represented by the Superior General...and so the superior cannot give subjects to a bishop except on that condition (community life), which is a real tacit contract"*.⁵

Why is community life so essential?

Libermann gives two reasons why he has made such an unequivocal choice; living in community is chosen with a view to a) the sanctification of the missionary and b) the efficiency with which the work will be carried out.

a) The sanctification of the missionary. Basic to all Libermann's ideas on mission is the insistence on the holiness of the missionary. Without that, no amount of dedicated activity will achieve anything of value. Writing to Mgr. Kobès in 1851, he drew conclusions from the first apostolic endeavours of the zealous young men he had sent to Africa, full of good will but with a tendency to get their priorities confused: *"These poor children, having left their country to become missionaries, have always said to themselves; "Above all, I am a*

missionary". As a result, and without being aware, they do not attach enough importance to religious life and spend too much time in activity of various kinds. If my surmise is correct, it would be important to enlighten these confrères by making them see that mission is indeed the purpose of their lives, but the religious life is the means sine qua non...If they are saintly religious, they will bring salvation to men. If they are not, they will achieve nothing because blessing goes with holiness. Their holiness depends entirely on their fidelity to the practices of religious life".⁶

The effectiveness of a community as a sanctifying agent will depend on the quality of the community life and the genuineness of the mutual concern that is shown by its members. Community does not work ex opere operato! *"Charity should be effective. It will not be enough to have it in one's heart. It must show itself by each member's close relations with his confrères: by the services he renders on every occasion; by the courtesy and good will he puts into it; by the kindness with which he treats them, whether in words or in his conduct towards them"*.⁷ Giving time to one another should take precedence over everything else, including ministry: *"Whether they live in the stations or in community, they will not exercise the sacred ministry during the times set aside for piety, meals and recreation, apart from extraordinary and urgent cases..."*.⁸

b) The efficiency of the work. In his memorandum to Propaganda in 1840, long before he had any practical experience to draw upon, Libermann had concluded that genuine team work would be far more efficacious than the isolated efforts of individuals: *"When one lives in community and is directed in everything by the same superior, the good that is done is incomparably greater than if each worked in isolation from the other...Things are done with greater energy...everything is thought out better and properly put into effect...A life of community has untold advantages."*⁹

Libermann draws some practical conclusions from these principles

- ◆ Where possible, confrères will live in communities whose mem-

bers will put themselves at the disposal of the local parish priests: *"If it can, the Congregation will set up establishments of its own members living in community, who will serve as auxiliaries to parish priests, under the authority of the Ordinary.....They will try to make themselves useful to these ecclesiastics by every means not opposed to our rules"*.¹⁰

- ♦ Because of the option taken for community and religious life, the Congregation will normally refuse to take on the responsibility for parishes: *"Only exceptionally and for very grave reasons will the communities accept parishes, and always on condition that the members who are in charge will live in community and observe their rule"*.¹¹
- ♦ If there is no way to avoid somebody working alone, it shall be for a brief period and only selected persons should be chosen for such an apostolate; *"Although missionaries should live in community and be at least two together, nevertheless they can, if necessary, exercise the sacred ministry alone for a short period of time. Those who keep the rule exactly and who are most given to the interior life will be chosen for this kind of ministry. As far as possible, the same confrères should not always be sent out in this way. and ordinarily, an interval shall be left so that they can take up again the habits of community life"*.¹²

THE REALITY

Almost without exception, community life has a high profile in the visitation reports I have read, reflecting the concerns of both the Visitors and confrères visited. There are constant references to those who live and work alone. No accurate figures are available of the number of Spiritans concerned, but a rough calculation from the 1993 *"Etat du Personnel"* shows that around 30% of our membership were living alone or with non-Spiritans at that time.

The overall picture that emerges is uneven.

Some reports show encouraging progress towards community,

flowing from a conviction that this is how Spiritans should live:

"It is now the exception for a confrere to live alone. There are regular area reflection meetings that last a morning or the whole day; others have a weekly meal together." Elsewhere, we read that "generally, the confrères have a simple life-style. There are at least two living together in each of the communities and missions. Many people appreciate the necessity of community life and efforts have been made in the Circumscription to promote this" The following would be fairly typical of confreres in different circumscriptions who are convinced of the need for genuine community living: "Some confreres expressed the hope of being able to live in a community of at least three persons: "it is mutually stimulating, we encourage one another; with only two people, when one is on trek, the other is alone". Another talked of setting up larger communities around the more important poles of activity....When one is alone, some evenings can seem very long... One young confrere would give more attention to the quality of community life than to the work itself, to the importance of fraternal relations above the functions of the priest or brother".

But elsewhere, in both old and new foundations, the visitors give a less encouraging picture:

"There is a prevailing feeling that community life is in trouble. Spiritans are scattered over a large area. There are community meetings and these are greatly appreciated. There is still a warm welcome for visitors. At the same time, there are failures in communication. There is an incipient lack of interest in each other". One sad result of this is the lack of opportunity to pray together and measure work being done against the standard of the gospels; "The pity of it is not that some rule is not being observed, but that our world-view is not being sufficiently exposed to God's word shared in common. Today's challenges don't come home to us. Gospel energy passes us by. We are in danger of making bad errors of judgement, e.g. about the meaning and responsibility for growth - I planted, Apollos waters, God gives growth"

One report laments at some length the ways in which pastoral considerations seem to take precedence so often over the preservation of the

community style of living and working:

"Because of the demands created by the spread of the Circumscription in the country, many of the confrères are living alone in the missions.At times, the reasons given for this are not only the scarcity of personnel but also the inability of these missions to maintain more than one person... A situation where a number of young confrères in the first few years of their pastoral ministry are charged with responsibilities and left without the support of a community life is very unsatisfactory and should not be allowed to continue. Living alone for a long time has consequences for the individual and the Congregation. It often tends to promote a style of independent living and "one-man-show" approach to work, all of which make community life and team work with others more difficult in later life.....

Community life must be seen by all as an essential dimension of the consecration in the Spiritan family. This applies to those in initial formation as well as those in ministry. Through the fraternal life in community, each one learns to live with those whom God has put at his side, accepting their positive traits along with their differences and limitations... When we learn to be more open with one another and have deeper sharing among ourselves, we are able to deal with those stresses that are inevitable in community living.

Since community life is so essential to the Spiritan way of life, the right of individuals to have the support of a good local community needs to be given more serious consideration by the Circumscription in the acceptance of new pastoral commitments in the future"

It is not long before living in isolation makes it very difficult or even impossible for a confrère to return to life and work in a community: "Some confrères living alone find it almost impossible to consider community life. For the last 15 years, Chapters and Assemblies have reminded us regularly of the necessity to live in community, but many situations have remained unchanged". In another report, a superior complains that "when efforts are made to give an isolated confrère a companion, the reaction is often that there is not enough work

here for two men" !

Regional communities

The regional community was recognised in the Chapter of 1968 (CDD 253), reviewed in that of 1974 and incorporated into the Spiritan Rule of Life in 1986 (SRL 32.2). The *Handbook* accompanying the rule, mindful, no doubt, of the insistence of Libermann on real community and having looked at the chequered history of our so-called "regional communities" to that date, warns that the demanding conditions laid down in SRL 32.2 (a superior, sharing of possessions, frequent meetings for communal discernment regarding work etc.) must be observed if such an extended community is going to be anything more than "a cover-up for rampant individualism":

*"To the extent alone to which it is faithful to the regulations that are enumerated in no. 32.2 of the Rule of Life can the regional community be a spiritan community. Putting together a regional community and keeping it going asks of all its members a very, very strong community spirit."*¹³

THE FUTURE?

One encouraging thing is that despite the many difficulties that Spiritans have experienced over the last 150 years in realising the community ideal of Libermann, the ideal itself has never been abandoned or even watered down. Our Spiritan Rule of Life devotes a whole chapter to it, repeating, without qualification or comment, the uncompromising stand taken by Libermann on the necessity of community life for all Spiritans (SRL 27). We realise that the salvation in Christ which we preach is essentially communitarian. Coming from community, our missionary aim is to build up community in Christ wherever we are sent and we know that we cannot preach what we have not experienced.

So however noble and convincing the reasons for it appear to be, the continuing gap between our theory and practice leaves us with an uncomfortable feeling. We are challenged by our young aspirants when what they read about community in the *Rule of Life* is sometimes

difficult to find on the ground. In letting pastoral needs shape our life-style to the extent that 30% of our members are living and working alone, we are still a long way from that return to our Founders' inspiration that was so much insisted upon by Vatican II. And this independent living inevitably has serious implications for our practice of poverty and the sharing of our resources.

Breast-beating can be taken too far. We can be justly proud of the part our family has played in the modern missionary movement, particularly in the evangelisation of Africa. But we are no longer being asked to evangelise vast areas, to take exclusive responsibility for huge numbers of people. We now work everywhere at the service of local Churches, usually in relatively small groups. So is it not time to look once again at Libermann's vision of the primacy of community life at the service of the apostolate? Should we not consider, for example, returning to a policy whereby we accept to run parishes *"only exceptionally and for grave reasons"* and to take as the norm spiritan communities *"that will serve as auxiliaries to parish priests"*? Any search for a new missionary role for Spiritans in the 21st. century must take the initial vision of Francis Libermann as its starting point. His arguments in favour of this vision sound every bit as convincing today as when he first wrote them. We leave the last word to him:

*"... They see souls to be saved, work to be done, and community life as a fetter to be shaken off. They have done with community life in order to give vent to their burning desires... They console themselves for the loss of recollection and community life by the good that is being done to the souls they try to save, and they never think of the harm to themselves and others... If the Congregation was reduced to this by the imprudent zeal of its members, what use would it be?"*¹⁴

¹ "Règlements" (1849) ND X, p.537.

² "Règlements", ND X, 454.

³ "Règlements", ND X 452

⁴ "Règlements", where it deals with the admission of postulants. ND X 457.

⁵ ND IX, 99,188

⁶ ND XIII 354

⁷ "Règlements", ND X 540

⁸ "Règlements", ND X 470.

⁹ *Memoire à Mgr. Cadolini, Secrétaire de la Propagande*", ND II 71.

¹⁰ "Règlements", ND X 453

¹¹ "Règlements", ND X, 455

¹² "Règlements", ND X, 469

¹³ *"A Handbook for the Spiritan Rule of Life"*, p. 35.

¹⁴ ND XIII 254. A letter to M. Collin, (1851) claiming that such attitudes are already threatening spiritan community life in Mauritius and Guinea.

« Using our gifts is building community. If we are not faithful to our gifts, we are harming the community and each of its members as well. So it is important that all members know what their gifts are, use them and take responsibility for developing them; it is important that the gift of each member is recognised and that each is accountable to the others for the use to which this gift is put. We all need each other's gifts; we must encourage their growth and our fidelity to them. Everyone will find their place in community according to their gift. They will become not only useful, but unique and necessary to the others. And so rivalry and jealousy will evaporate ».

Jean Vanier: "Community and Growth" p.53

LIVING TOGETHER FOR MISSION

By the students of Clamart and Torre d'Aguilha.

Community life is not just reserved to spiritan confreres in the field; it is also a deep concern of those who are preparing for missionary life. Two formation communities have kindly agreed to share their ideas and aspirations on the common life: Torre d'Aguilha in Portugal and Clamart in France. Although written independently, their themes, their ideals and the demands they make of each other are very similar.

Torre d'Aguilha

At Easter, 1997, there was a meeting of young spiritan students from Europe at Lisbon. During their time together, they shared their ideas on what they expect from community life. Here are some echoes, coming from the Portuguese students.

Community life is seen by us as an important element in the growth of the missionary vocation. A well-structured community is indispensable for a Spiritan throughout his period of formation. According to SRL, community life is *"an essential element in the spiritan way of life"*. It gives us our identity: the Spiritan will never live alone and his community will be the dynamic base from which his life will unroll. But if community living brings us great riches, it also includes serious obligations – both for our personal lives and in our relations with others.

For all Spiritans, and in a special way for those in formation, community is the first place where we meet "our brothers", in listening to the Word of God and in prayer. It is a special place for a journey in faith. It gives us opportunities for sharing and is often a real source of joy.

Three Essentials

The Portuguese students stressed three essential elements during the meeting at Torre d'Aguilha:

- Community life must be seen as *a meeting with God in the others with whom we live*. This is a fundamental point and will always

need to be deepened. If we can understand and live this reality in our formation community, we will be ready and able to discover God in other people when we are on mission.

Our formation communities must be fully open to the missionary situations of our time, so that we can already be living mission from the start, even if our opportunities for pastoral action are necessarily limited. If we can get stuck into the reality of the most abandoned as of now, we will be more able to hear other calls when our formation is finished.

- The missionary “stage” should take place *in a community that can answer the needs and expectations of our missionary formation*. The presence of somebody to accompany the young confrere is essential but is not sufficient in itself; the *whole* community has a formative role to play. During our “stage” we should experience that unity with other confreres which is a living witness of Christ amongst the people to whom we are sent; community life is one of the gifts that God gives us for an authentic presentation of his Son to the people. Such an experience of community will help us to be more fully integrated later on in our missionary life.
- In his exhortation “*Vita Consecrata*” (No. 51), John Paul II insists on the fact that “*communities of consecrated life have the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, beginning with their internal life...*”, and he adds that these communities “*are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony*”.

Being in community carries with it several exigencies: to live in the truth with one another, to search for harmony and mutual acceptance, to look together at the realities of today’s world.

What the Pope says is *extremely relevant for us*, because in the Congregation, international missionary communities are being established everywhere and this tendency is set to continue. Our communities will be made up of people with different languages and cultures and coming from different age-groups. A constant fraternal concern for each other, as a witness to charity and

reconciliation, must always be a characteristic of our communities, where people of widely differing backgrounds will seek to find in the meeting of cultures a respect for the other person and a mutual enrichment. Through our living together, we can become signs that witness to the possibility of acculturation.

Community life is a witness to the Good News. Fraternal love, lived out each day, is a sign of hope for those around us, as well as a source of joy for ourselves. When we come up against difficulties in the life of our communities, we need to go beyond ourselves and try to meet the other person, bereft of any prejudices. Certainly, on the part of each one of us, this calls for a high degree of forgetfulness of self and a large capacity for welcoming others.

In a society that is so marked by individualism, our life together throws out a challenge: it tries to be a sign for our times. It is great to be asked to give one's life to co-operate in the missionary plan of Jesus Christ. The discovery and carrying out of this project is all the more exciting and enriching.

Clamart

Clamart is a second-cycle formation community in Paris with young Spiritans from different countries. The make-up of the community changes each year, but the demanding and rewarding challenge of international living continues for all its members, old and new.

As with all formation communities, Clamart has to be re-built each year. The average time for remaining here is three years, so there is a constant change in personnel. Consequently, our community project has to be re-defined in view of the new arrivals. The essential remains the same, but some points have to be adapted at the beginning of each academic year.

Clamart is an inter-cultural community. For example, in 1997 it was made up of 16 members (13 students and 3 formators) coming from the FAC, the WAF, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zaire and France.

Our life is necessarily built around studies: some go to the Institut

Catholique, others to the Centre Sèvres, others again to the Alliance Française. Each confrere is also involved in a pastoral work. There are many different types of insertion: literacy programmes, work with the homeless, school and hospital chaplaincies, work with migrants, the Y.C.W. and the Oeuvre d'Auteuil.

These two elements – our inter-cultural community life and our various pastoral works – naturally have a big influence on our life together. **We would like to point out the elements that seem important to us in the building of the community**, even if we do not always live up to the ideals that we set ourselves. At the same time, we will be showing the kind of life we would like to live in our future mission.

A community of sharing and support

We feel that community should be, above all, *a support for our religious and missionary life*. This support is shown particularly in our sharing: sharing of faith and sharing of our motivation. Some occasions are more important than others in our formation community; for example, when we are submitting our requests for vows or ordination, there is a great deal of sharing...or when, during the eucharist, we each take our turn with the homily.

But let us not give the impression that everything is perfect or easy. *Sometimes we find it difficult to share things that are important to us* - our faith, our worries, our pastoral difficulties. We do not talk enough together about our work or our pastoral insertion, and when we do, it can easily remain at the superficial level. It is often easier to share in depth with a few rather than with all the members of the community. Moreover, too often we allow ourselves to be carried away by our studies; it is not easy to find the right balance between studies, pastoral work and community life. Our timetables and the fact that we are following different courses can sometimes make it difficult to bring everything together.

Thinking about our future ministry on mission, we are concerned about the balance that needs to be kept between pastoral work and

community life. Will there be enough of us to make up a real community? Will confreres who are 30 or more kilometres apart be really able to live a community life? And if we are scattered, how often will we be able to get together to share our lives? Will we be carried away by the demands of apostolic work?

An open community

Another thing we consider to be very important is *the openness of our community to those outside*. We have what we call “Clamart evenings” when we discuss burning questions like immigration, éxclusion, ecumenism etc. These are very important events because they make us to do and experience something together. They also enable us to meet the people who live in the neighbourhood and who help us in our research. These meetings sometimes lead to one or the other confrere getting more deeply involved in different topics that are treated. For example, as a result of these evenings, one of us took up work with the CCFD (the Catholic Committee against hunger and for development) and another had regular meetings with a group of Protestants. One must also add that this openness extends to inviting people to share a meal with us.

The international make-up of our community is *something that people find striking*, particularly young people. A glance at our visitors’ book will bear this out. Of course we have had to sort out some problems arising from our different ways of looking at things. But the fact that people from such different places are living together is something very enriching for us who have been called to this kind of community. For example, the liturgy is enlivened by what each of us brings to it; even if we have differing approaches to quite a number of things, we are able to discuss and identify these differences amongst ourselves and thereby arrive at a better understanding of each other’s point of view. The discussion on the use of money spoke volumes for us!

All this sharing is very formative; it calls us to an on-going conversion. To live in an intercultural community is not all plain sailing. If it is difficult to really understand somebody of the same

culture, it is even more so when one lives with others from such a wide variety of countries. More than in any other circumstances, genuine dialogue is essential.

Attention has to be paid to *culture-shock*. Coming across certain types of behaviour...or experiencing a liturgy that one finds lifeless...or the type of language that some people are apt to use...such things as these can be difficult to accept, and serious misunderstandings can easily develop. The formators (who can experience the same difficulties in their own group) have to help us to analyse our reactions and to reflect on our community experiences so we can learn lessons for our future missionary life.

The community also plays *an irreplaceable role in our spiritual formation*. Each year we have periods of retreat and recollection; we also have groups that we call “groupes de progression spirituelle”. We think it is important to reflect together about our spiritual spirituality and not just leave this important area to individual initiatives. Such a sharing has taken place several times when we have invited confreres to talk about their missionary experience.

The Superior of the Community

One cannot talk of community without talking of communication. We have to look for opportunities to express and share our ideas. But we have to be realistic. There are several ready-made opportunities, like the weekly community meetings. These must be real meetings, not just gatherings to share information and sort out the practicalities of our daily lives. We must not waste these occasions but use them for a sharing that is deep and authentic. To help us in this task, *the role of the Superior is of great importance*. Without being too directive, he can breath life into the community and help us to share, live and act as a family. In this way we will grow together, because we will have created a real community where it is good to live and where one feels at home.

A REFLECTION ON RETIREMENT

By Charles Coffey

Charles Coffey, of the Province of USA West, talks of community in the context of retirement. In the midst of difficulties that older confreres experience, community life can continue to be a place of discernment and support when it is adapted to their particular needs.

When I was a student in the Senior Seminary advancing toward the priesthood, I was asked to care for a few older Fathers who were assigned there, some retired from active ministry and others who were sick. During those years, there was no house of retirement.

I was strongly influenced in those years by various Fathers whose problems were related to the letting go of ministry that had been already assumed by others. Also, there was the pain of separation from people where the Fathers had not only been the evident center of life for people who were dependent on them, but, perhaps without knowing it, they in turn were dependent on the people. Now not even the love and respect of the local community seemed to meet their personal needs and certainly could not replace ministry in their lives. After twenty-five or more years in the service of the Lord, leaving it was a soul-wrenching and physically depressing situation that left them desolate.

I recall seminary conferences about the need for total personal dedication in ministry. The seminary director frequently said that Holy Ghost Fathers, as missionaries, "*died with their boots on*". I adopted this attitude and hoped that this would be my own way of exiting this life.

Two forms of retirement

As I reflect on these experiences, I recognize the need for two very different forms of retirement. One is the retirement of *Spiritans who are mobile*. They can live in community, care for themselves, participate in community functions, and assist the local church by ministry. Such confreres ought to be able to enjoy a place for privacy as well as community life. Consideration should be given to personal and group

community life. Consideration should be given to personal and group counseling about leaving ministry, about their own dignity when their ability to work is limited, and on the positive value of life in retirement. The importance of personal leadership that will guide them to a common sharing of life should be a daily experience.

Another form of retirement is for those who are not mobile and who, because of their weaknesses, whatever they may be, *cannot totally care for themselves*. Such retirement demands professional consultation and discernment. There is a special need here for professional counseling so that full cooperation can lead to an improvement in both physical health and attitude, and perhaps a return to mobility. While living under such limitations, even devout priests and religious can quickly lose a vision of the true value of life.

The meaning of retirement

However, before any retirement program, there is a need for the Province to examine and perhaps define what retirement means for a religious missionary and a priest. Pope Paul II, in his post-synodal letter "*Christifideles Laici*", has something to say to older people:

"I now address older people, oftentimes unjustly considered as unproductive if not directly, an insupportable burden. I remind older people that the Church expects them to continue to exercise their mission in the apostolic and missionary life. This is not only a possibility for them, but it is their duty even in this time in their life when age itself provides opportunities in some specific and basic way.

The Bible delights in presenting the older person as the symbol of someone rich in wisdom and fear of the Lord (cf Sir.25:4-6). In this sense, the gift of older people can be specifically the witness to tradition in the faith, both in the Church and in society (cf Ps.44:2; Ex.12:36-27), the teacher of the lessons of life (cf Sir.6: 34; 8:11-12) and the works of charity".

At this moment the growing number of older people in different countries worldwide and the expected retirement of persons from

various professions and the work-place provides older people with a new opportunity in the apostolate. Involved in the task is their determination to overcome the temptation of taking refuge in the nostalgia in a never-to-return past or fleeing from present responsibility because of difficulties encountered in the world of one novelty after another. They must always have a clear knowledge that one's role in the Church and society does not stop at a certain age at all, but at such times knows only new ways of applications. As the Psalmist says, *"They still bring forth fruit in old age, and are ever full of sap and green to show that the Lord is upright (Ps:92 15-16),*

The Pope goes on to say;

"Arriving at an older age is to be considered a privilege: not simply because not everyone has the good fortune to reach this stage in life, but also, and above all, because this period provides real possibilities for better evaluating the past, for knowing and living more deeply the Pascal Mystery, for becoming an example in the Church for the whole people of God.... Despite the complex nature of the problems you face - a strength that progressively diminishes, the insufficiencies of social organizations, official legislation that comes late, or the lack of understanding by a self-centered society - you are not to feel yourself as persons underestimated in the life of the Church or as passive objects in a fast paced world, but as participants at a time in life which is humanly and spiritually fruitful. You still have a mission to fulfill, a contribution to make. According to the divine plan, each individual human being lives a life of continual growth from the beginning of existence to the moment at which the last breath is taken." (no. 48)

Basic requirements for retirement

First of all, a priest or brother must have a solidly *good and improving idea of himself* as he begins retirement. He must learn to transfer himself from a life dedicated to ministerial duties where his personal values and his life, as he sees them, are closely related to the importance of his work for others who depend on him. Now, in retirement,

he sees his life in other relationships and activities. Where limitations are by necessity imposed on him, such as the need to give up driving an automobile and restriction on his mobility, he needs personal and/or group counseling and the help of frequent positive leadership in activities that assist him to grow in respect for his own life and its value.

Another factor is *the question of power*. Many Spiritans during their ministry live alone, where there is no struggle over who is in control. Where other Spiritans live in community, circumstances lead to a balanced life. But community life in retirement brings new situations where each member of the community will try to control life according to his own views and needs. Community can be a very destructive bomb if one or two can exercise the power of decision for their own convenience. Here, again, good leadership is required on a daily basis. The leadership can direct the community to a consensus where all can be at peace. Each one must feel that the community is living on a level field where everyone is listened to and decisions are common property.

Community prayer has not been the experience of many spiritan confreres. They have often spent their working life living alone, so among the tendencies they developed were independence before God and individuality in spirituality. The beautiful retreat prayer experiences of the Western Province over the past few years have been idealistic, but few, if any, brought home a hope of establishing that experience as a model to be followed. When Spiritans retire to community, there is a special need to find a viable way toward common prayer. It is important that this daily experience be planned for the common good, without scrupulous dependency on rubrics and with a sense of doing whatever is necessary to bring everyone a real sense of satisfaction in being together in the presence of God. The daily concelebration of *the Eucharist* is expected to be part of community life. Many differences in ideals and practices have found their way into the life of each confrere. Those in positions of leadership can direct the community to find a balance for the common life in this daily priestly duty.

There is a need within the nature of common life to find help in community discussions of mutual interests, to participate in cultural

a restaurant, to see a movie together, and to visit the local places of interest, etc. No person can continue to live within the four walls of a house, be it a religious community or any other kind of institution, without creating depression and a spirit of giving up on life and growth. There are activities that help us respect life and our participation in it. These activities need to be planned by a creative leadership that can rise above objections and continue to offer a way of life that can lead to contentment and growth.

The Casa Laval Community Residence at Hemet has moved in this direction under two Provincial Administrations and their Councils. A non-retired Spiritan with special interest in this ministry was appointed superior to lead the community. The chapel, the community and dining rooms and a growing library serve everybody's needs. A religious of the community of St. Joseph (a professional nurse) and her assistant care for the health of the confreres. A dedicated staff look after the upkeep of the rooms and prepare the meals. Community meetings ensure the participation of everyone's voice in the running of the community.

The three Spiritan Communities at Hemet

Spiritans are justly proud of Our Lady of the Valley Parish in Hemet. There is an apostolic ministry in a valley of 175,000 people and in a town of 55,000 where over 50% are retired people. There is also a powerful challenge to serve a large youthful population and a growing number of Mexican immigrants, about 20% of the Valley population, who come with hope for a better life.

To better meet the needs of all these people, the Western Province founded a second Parish and Community dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Both Spiritan communities try to work together in fraternal cooperation.

Contiguous to the property of the Our Lady of the Valley Parish is the Casa Laval Community where the retired Spiritans reside. Members of this community are invited to serve in the apostolic work of both parishes. This ministry has been mutually beneficial. The retired Fathers can participate by offering Mass, administering the Sacraments, preaching and teaching and by counseling the people where the wisdom

of their years is appreciated.

The three communities, Our Lady of the Valley Parish, the Holy Spirit Parish and Casa Laval Community, come together each week to share a meal and friendship. The confreres frequently visit each other to share mutual interests.

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« Community is made by the gentle concern that people show each other every day. It is made by small gestures of caring, by services and sacrifices which say « I love you » and « I am happy to be with you ». It is letting the other go in front of you, not trying to prove that you are right in a discussion; it is taking small burdens from the other. « Do not do anything out of jealousy or vanity ; but in humility, count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to selfish interests, but to those of others ».

- Jean Vanier: "Community and Growth" p. 48.

SPIRITAN COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE

by Jean-Paul Hoch

After many years working in the Central African Republic, Jean-Paul served as Provincial of the French Province from 1991 to 1997. In September 1998, he joined the new team of Spiritans in Taiwan. Below we reproduce his input article given at the General Chapter in Maynooth in the summer of 1998.

Introduction

A few preliminary remarks to begin with. Although in this article I will be speaking directly of the spiritan communities of France, the fact that the ten European Provinces are now meeting with increasing frequency has made me realise that what I have to say about the French communities will also apply in many ways to other Provinces.

I am unable and unwilling to make an ethnological study of this surprising and admirable phenomenon - a group of celibates living together! Nor do I want to indulge in a sort of religious and apostolic stock-taking of our communities, comparing the high ideal traced out in our Rule of Life with what human fragility has been able to come up with in practice. Instead I will try to adopt the approach of the impressionist painters, who by using rapid and delicate touches of the brush, hope to produce a meaningful picture from these different patches of colour.

Before launching into this topic, a word about "non-community life". Of the 420 confreres appointed to the Province of France on December 31, 1997, a good number (around 90) were not living in community. Some, who go under the title of "*dependent on the provincial team*" are, like the captains of ships in days of old, dependent on nobody but themselves and God. Others, who retain more or less permanent links with the Province, are living alone from a spiritan point of view. There are hundreds of reasons to explain these situations - the demands of ministry, personal satisfaction, the impossibility of finding a suitable community. Our four regional superiors spend a great deal of time and

effort visiting these confreres and trying to bring them together from time to time. The concept of the "regional community" which was set up with these kind of confreres in mind, remains largely an empty shell.

1. A place and source of finance

In the first place, a community is a place, a house, a source of finance, and a package of particular material conditions. These material conditions encourage (or discourage) community life far more than we think. A disembodied idealism should be avoided like the plague! In France, we have inherited from our history, from the work of our predecessors and from the generosity of our benefactors, several beautiful and large properties. Down the years, we have had not only to maintain and restore these buildings and properties, but sometimes to adapt them radically in the light of changes to community life and the advent of new community projects. To make an old scholasticate into a House of Welcome, a one-time junior seminary into a house of retirement, a middle-class residence into a house of formation -while at the same time observing the strict legislation regarding schools and public buildings - all this takes up much time and money. Sometimes we have to ask questions about the ultimate fate of our architectural heritage.

We are very fortunate to have an excellent group of devoted, competent and enterprising bursars, working under the direction of the provincial bursar. For a given community, the fact that it is involved in building work can be a sign of dynamism and hope. The management of community finances is always a delicate subject. There is a thin line between a monarchical strictness and the opposite excess of each one for himself. For example, there have to be regular reminders that mass intentions are not pocket money to be used by spiritan priests as they like. On the other hand, I have so often found, with communities and individuals, a great simplicity of life and, when solidarity is called for, a great generosity. To encourage such transparency and solidarity, the Province has adopted the habit of sending each confrere a statement of accounts of the provincial administration.

2. People

In the places mentioned above, people live and work. When we talk of spiritan communities, we can no longer think simply in terms of Spiritans. There are religious sisters who share our lives, our prayer, our work: Sisters of the Holy Spirit, Sisters of Saint-Méen, Indian sisters (Franciscans of the Presentation of Coimbatore), Nigerian Sisters (Holy Family Sisters of the Needy). There are also salaried employees devotedly looking after such indispensable services as the kitchen, cleaning, laundry etc. Very recently, three spiritan lay associates have been closely inserted into communities. Sometimes, the spiritan community itself is situated within a larger entity, as, for example, in the College des Missions at Blotzheim or in several houses of the Oeuvre d'Auteuil.

More and more, communities include members from other circumscriptions. Twelve of the twenty three communities of the Province have non-French confreres sharing in their life and work. We are deeply indebted to those European (Belgium, Holland, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland) and African circumscriptions (the EAP, FAC, Nigeria) which have sent 17 confreres on mission ad extra to France. We hope that this exchange-movement will grow in the years to come. *For understanding, mutual respect and peace between peoples, a good international community is far more efficacious than hours of impassioned oratory.* How could one remain narrowly nationalist, for instance, during the recent World Cup, when French, Nigerians, Dutch and Brazilians all found themselves huddled round the same television set?

Six communities are specially designated and organised for older confreres, but most of the other communities also have senior Spiritans in their ranks. Finally, we can point to the great variety of size of our communities, ranging from 2 confreres to more than 60. This extreme diversity in the make-up of our communities makes any kind of classification virtually impossible. The truth of this will be seen even more in what follows!

3. An Activity

Where do all these people, grouped together in the same place in a spiritan community, find their unity? First of all, in a common work. The work of formation is divided into first cycle (Chevilly/Lille) and second cycle (the international house at Clamart). Our six "retirement" houses are far from being limited to just that; all have a missionary outreach (reception of guests, pastoral help for the surrounding parishes). Several communities are specifically targeted at missionary and vocational animation: Alex, Valence, Bordeaux, Blotzheim, Rennes, Saint-Lo, Neufgrange, Lille, JEM. These same communities are often involved in pastoral work for immigrants. The Oeuvre d'Auteuil remains a work of great importance and priority for the Province of France. More than 20 confreres are involved, no longer so much in isolation but rather in communities (international if possible), as at Chateaux de Vaux, where there are Nigerian, Polish and French confreres working together. Finally, there is the indispensable service to mission *ad extra* and animation of the Province, work done by the Mother House, the Mission Procure, the three reviews (*Pentecôte sur le Monde*, *L'Echo de la Mission*, *La Revue de Saint-Joseph* of Alex), the history and *Memoire Spiritaine*, the *Fraternités Esprit et Mission* (in collaboration with the spiritan sisters), the *Fraternité du Saint-Esprit* and the review of the same name.

It seems to me that for a community to grow in its activities, three things have to be emphasised:

Firstly, that *the work should be chosen and executed in close collaboration with the local Church*. The experience of the Bordeaux community is a good example of this. A few years ago, a group of confreres were working at missionary animation, mainly from and in the chapel. There was little outreach, and the question arose of closing the community. We started a dialogue with the bishop and those in charge of the diocese. We succeeded in drawing up a new pastoral project, centered on missionary animation and care of immigrants, and other confreres were appointed. In this way, the sole surviving spiritan house in France that was founded by Libermann has experienced a new lease of life.

Secondly, the work of the community should include both *mission ad intra* and *mission ad extra*, both being seen as an identical service to the poor. When we were setting up the community at Rennes, this is what we were asked for by the local Church.

Thirdly, the works of the community *must be precisely defined in the community project* and regularly evaluated.

Finally, in the context of the community as a place of action, there is one difficulty that often arises. *It can happen that in a given community, the confreres are engaged in such differing works that apostolic activity is no longer a source of unity but of division.* So the community can be reduced to nothing more than a practical and convenient base for operations. It is no longer the community that is the principle agent of activity and the place for discernment, but rather each separate individual. *The search for a dynamic balance between the responsibility of each one and a commitment to a common goal is one of our most difficult tasks at the present time.* When a community arrives at a point where centrifugal forces are prevailing over centripetal forces, some members will look elsewhere for what the community is failing to provide for them - personal finances to the detriment of a common sharing, other compensations (alcohol or others), an affective life that is targeted in the wrong direction etc.

4. An Organisation

In a community, how can Spiritans, who often seem to differ so much from one another, live together in the service of a common work? A minimum (perhaps a maximum) of organization is called for. Muscles, however well-developed they may be, are pretty useless if they are not firmly attached to a solid skeleton. A brain - even the most brilliant - would soon be damaged if it were not encased in a strong cranial container. As elsewhere, the organization of our communities in France is firmly supported by three feet: the superior, the bursar and the house council (or if the community is small, all the confreres). It is becoming more and more difficult to find confreres who will accept these posts and who have the necessary competence. Six years (two mandates of

three years) pass very quickly, perhaps not for the superior and bursar in question, but certainly for the provincial team which has the responsibility of finding men for these jobs.

There was a time when some looked on community meetings as either suspect or useless, achieving nothing that could not be more easily dealt with over breakfast! But the main reason for such meetings is not to sort out problems but to express a commitment to live joyfully together. It seems that the nature and usefulness of such gatherings are better understood today, and that confreres are insisting more on the quality of these meetings.

5. External relationships

As with the cells of a living body, it is not enough for each community to be well organised within itself, with all the necessary components and a precise common work; *communities also have to relate to each other and to the world around them.* In France, inter-community relations happen, in general, in the context of our four regions, each led by a superior. There are informal get-togethers for feasts and funerals, but also regular meetings for sharing, reflection and collaboration. Besides the provincial bulletin, there is another called "*Aux Quatre Vents*", which acts as a channel for each region to communicate its life and dynamism to the others. The annual retreats, which take place regularly in several communities of the Province, are another opportunity for meeting and sharing.

Just as important for the life of a community are its relations with the world around it: local society, the local Church and other such institutions. An example; A young confrere was recently ordained at Blotzheim where he had done his pastoral year as a deacon. He will leave shortly for Pakistan. The auxiliary bishop of Strasbourg ordained him, the parish choir led the singing and many others contributed to the organization of the occasion. The local mayor and member of parliament were among the congregation and many of the local priests came to lay their hands on the ordinand. Another example: our community at Valence is known by the local Church not just as a place for training possible future Spiritans but also as a place of accompaniment for candidates for the diocese.

Relations with our confreres dispersed around the world are also a source of dynamism for the life of our communities. It is through the commitment and "quiet heroism" of these confreres far away that the Province is known as missionary. It is often their availability that makes it possible for the Province to find the animators, formators and superiors that it needs.

6. A Soul

All that has been said so far would be true of any group of people or any association which is concerned about its solidity, usefulness and future. To speak accurately of a spiritan community, we have to go further. *What is it that holds us together?* It is not the convenience of the places where we live or the great advantages that flow from a life lived in common; nor is it the qualities that each of us brings or the common work we undertake. Rather, *it is something that defies definition, something mysterious - a bit like the soul, the spirit, the heart.* It is something that comes from the Spirit of the Father and the Son and somehow becomes our spirit - something that is given to us even before we try to build it up ourselves.

One of the things I discovered during my time on the provincial team was this: a superior (even if referred to as "major") is not the principal organism of the activities of the circumscription; the confreres on the spot normally know better than he what needs to be done and how to do it. Neither can he claim the credit if confreres live in peace and good relations with each other. There are many problems and difficulties whose solution in no way depends upon his efforts. His main concern should be the religious dimension of the life of the province and communities. It seems to me that we are discovering more and more the primacy of community spiritual life. Perhaps it is precisely this element that young people are looking for, before any idea of an "uplifting adventure".

For the last ten years, the provincial council has been offering a "Programme of animation for confreres and communities". This programme takes into account the important times of the liturgical year and seeks to encourage community spiritual reflection around a chosen

theme.

One can add that the growth of the *Fraternités Spiritaines* ", *Esprit et Mission*, has been an opportunity for many to rediscover Libermann. We have there a largely unused treasure, and we have to thank our confreres who are historians (both of Des Places and Libermann) for making us more aware of this rich and life-giving source.

It is in common prayer that this "soul" of the community is formed, nourished and expressed. We particularly see and admire a central place being given to this prayer in our houses of retirement. In the more active communities, the thousand and one preoccupations often prevent such a regular rhythm of prayer. But efforts are usually made so that at least at one moment of the day, all the community comes together to pray and that special times are set aside for the praise of the Lord. In many cases, where it is possible, community prayer is open to lay people. They seem to appreciate these occasions, even when we ourselves are sometimes tempted to find community prayer a bit monotonous. Their presence also encourages us to take more care in the preparation of our prayers.

Conclusion: communities in constant evolution.

To conclude this brief sharing, I would like to say a word on an important aspect of the life of our communities in France: *the constant evolution and incessant changes that are taking place*. We have long since left behind the idea that we live in a balanced and stable world; we see our world as characterized by "chaos", and new situations that could hardly have been foreseen. This is peculiar neither to France nor to the Church. In the context of our communities in France, let me point to some signs of this continuing and profound evolution.

First place must be given to *the continual drop in numbers and the rise in our average age*. There is no need to be a mathematician to calculate the duration and foresee the results of such a phenomenon. While continuing to live in the present - for it is always today that salvation is offered to us and mission must be carried out - we still have to prepare for this future, and preferably, in collaboration with the other Provinces of Europe which, apart from Poland, are going through the

the same process as ourselves. Many preparations are being made for these changes, some already with us, others which have still to happen:

- the importance given to vocations work,
- collaboration between provinces, especially in initial formation, with the excellent inter-provincial anglophone novitiate in Dublin,
- the appointment of young confreres from elsewhere,
- collaboration with Indian and Nigerian sisters,
- the "*Fraternités Esprit et Mission* " and the Associates,
- the reordering of some houses with a view to viable activities in line with our vocation,
- a greater spiritual attention to where the Spirit is leading us.

Over the years, we have seen how difficult it is for a community to change by itself; there is always a tendency to continue with what has always been done, and to avoid adapting to new circumstances. *To conceive and execute a completely new project, there is usually a need for a significant change of personnel in the community.* Hence the importance of "visits" by the members of the provincial team or the regional superiors, and, for the Province as a whole, the importance of visits from the General Council. Like those taking part in the Tour de France, which we saw recently in Ireland, there is always a temptation to "bury your head in the handlebars", or when playing football, the urge to head directly and in glorious isolation towards the opposing goal, forgetting that a match is won just as much with the head as with the feet!

Alongside this first great and profound change, that we normally refer to as "the crisis of vocations", our communities and our Province are coming up against another upsetting phenomenon which relates to *the very idea of "mission"*. The disillusionment is often very deep, the questions asked extremely radical. Confreres hesitate who are about to return to the missions. Some of the young ones, duly prepared by a solid initial formation and who left full of enthusiasm, quickly return home. "*Fidei donum*" missionaries get a better press from the Church than we who are "missionaries for life". We are not very keen to look such questions in the face, either personally or as communities. And when we do so, we often end up putting the blame on a world "that has

lost its way", or a Church "which has lost its sense of the universal". The sterility of such criticism is obvious. Also, we tend to work out our own personal concept of mission. We use the same words, but do we have the same ideals? *The cohesion of a community and its missionary outreach (the old "apostolic zeal") can suffer greatly as a result of this crisis in the missionary idea and ideal.* To avoid internal conflict and to give an image of peace to those outside, we often fail to challenge each other about this very foundation of our commitment. So we end up looking like a soccer team where each member is playing with his own personal football! We cannot separate our reflection on "our life together," from the other themes of the General Chapter, especially the theme of "our mission". May the Holy Spirit show us what needs to be done and unite us to bring it to fruition.

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AS OTHERS SEE US - THE WITNESS OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

By Ide de Lange

"By coming together from so many different places and cultures, we are saying to our brothers and sisters that the unity of the human race is not just an impossible dream" (Maynooth Chapter documents no. 4). The Chapter talked much of the witness value of community life and the impact it can have, especially where it is evident to everybody that the confreres come from all points of the compass. Ide de Lange of the Dutch Province describes the growing influence this witness has had in the mission to Boranaland in Ethiopia.

"Our Congregation is international, and our apostolic activity usually puts us in contact with a culture different from our own. Necessarily then our formation prepares us both for living in a community and in a situation that is intercultural." (SRL 141)

The beginnings

It was in 1972 that an International Spiritan Team was first sent to Ethiopia to work among the nomadic peoples of the south of Ethiopia - the Borana, the Gabbra and the Guji. The team consisted of members from the US/East Province and the Dutch Province. They mostly knew each other already since they had been working together in the District of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

In a sense, this venture was something new: members of different provinces coming together to form one team under the direct responsibility of the General Administration, rather than under the responsibility of their respective provinces of origin. Nonetheless, it has to be said that the provinces remained faithful in their support and encouragement. The autonomous and intercultural nature of the group was immediately brought home to them when they sat down to work out what community meant for them, what approach to evangelisation they shared and what concept they each had of "Church". The group needed time to work out their intercultural differences in order to create a team which would stand united in its work of First Evangelisation among the Borana.

Although the USA and Holland may be miles apart, *their internationality was far more evident to the group itself than to the local community amongst whom they lived.* It took time for people to give names to our countries of origin and tell them apart. Differences in behaviour etc. were regarded more as personal characteristics than cultural differences. Nevertheless, these initial formative years set us on the road to believing that *the internationality of the group was more than an accidental throwing together of different nationalities.* It was vital in our eyes for the outreach to other cultures in presenting the Gospel message.

The make-up of our team

At present, we have three communities in Borana, each with its own nucleus of missionaries working there. The places are Dhadim, Dhoqolle and Yavello, while a fourth station Darito/Dida Hara is still in the making. Although these places may be quite far apart - Dhadim to Dhoqolle is approximately 130 km – our group in all these places is regarded as one. At present, we are five Spiritans: two from Holland, two from Nigeria and one from the US/East Province. Moreover, there is one young man from Holland working with us who aspires to become a Spiritan. There are also four Medical Missionaries of Mary: two from the USA, one from Ireland and one from Tanzania. They are working with us in Borana and live in Dhadim. In addition to these ten members of our team, we have had, over the past three years, students from the EAP (East African Province) doing their Pastoral and Spiritan experience here in our group. *Close contact with one another and the high visibility of our group among the people means that we are seen as a group in the eyes of the people.* It is therefore quite normal for the people amongst whom we live and work to ask about the health and well-being of the other members of the group and name them by name.

The impact of our international team

Initially, our internationality was not particularly noticed. It was not until we were joined by the African members of our group, Sr. Lydia from Tanzania, Fr Peter Osuji from Nigeria, Fr Jerome Onwughalu from Nigeria, and all the students from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, that people began to ask such questions as *“How did you people come together?”*, *“Did you know one another before you came to Ethiopia”*, *“What brought you together, being from so many different nationali-*

ties?". The fact that we all preached the same Gospel had a particular impact. It wasn't just a "white man's Gospel" after all.

The easy acceptance of one another and the living together in one community baffled people to a considerable extent. They were not sure as to how to see the group as one. Questions were asked, especially of our African members, such as, "*How much do they pay you for the work you are doing for them?*" The answer that they got paid nothing and that the whole group formed one community did little to clarify the situation. However, slowly people came to accept us as we are, an international team, and our internationality turned into an asset to our work of preaching the Gospel. Answers to the above mentioned questions slowly began to make sense; we were brought together by our common belief in the Gospel and the need to spread the word, by our common call to go and preach the Good News to all who have not yet heard it, to bring hope to the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged. The living together in one community of people of quite different nationalities and cultures gave a strong witness to the unity of all believers. *In our meetings with them they realised that we wanted to share something with them that goes beyond the boundaries of individual nations and peoples.* Thus our internationality has become a witness to the Gospel for those who are willing to see it.

Contradictions

There are factors though that are not conducive to understanding what we represent. In the way we go about things, we cannot but resemble at times the many different relief and development organisations that operate in the country. Our involvement in schools, clinics and other different projects, our cars and obvious wealth to their eyes make this comparison quite understandable. The wealth of the Borana is not visible; it is on the hoof and is not reflected in their lifestyle, housing, luxury goods, etc. The fact that up to now the government does not recognise churches as faith communities but as NGOs, does nothing to help our image. We come under the same heading as organisations such as CARE, CONCERN, NCA, etc., so it is little wonder if people at times put us all in the same category.

This image is not very helpful in our work of evangelisation. One asks oneself how to correct such an impression. Our lifestyle is relatively simple; our means are sufficient but no more than that. Our open-house

lifestyle and sharing, living among the people, our prayer life and ministry may present us as men of God, preachers of the Gospel - but our involvement in schools, clinics, and development programmes, confirms in the minds of the people that we are just another relief agency with money to spend.

Conclusion

There are snags to everything. I know that we as a group of committed men and women, feel very strongly about the internationality of our group. Perhaps we need to pay more attention to the way we look at each other, appreciating our richness in intercultural experiences together, contributing from our cultural inheritance, supporting and enriching one another. Perhaps we should reflect more often on the sort of image we are presenting to the outside world. Is it a picture of people who are able to reach across boundaries and experience unity in Christ? Or is it the image of a multinational relief force which works together as long as the payment is good? We hope and pray that the first may prevail.

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COMMUNITY LIFE IN AN INTER-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

By Eddie Flynn

Certain spiritan groups have long since felt the need to put a deep commitment to community living at the very centre of their life and activity. Such has been the case from the start with our difficult venture in Pakistan. Eddie Flynn of the Irish Province has spent many years in this apostolate and shares his experiences of community with us.

*The soul selects her own society
Then shuts the Door
To her divine Majority
Present no more".
(Emily Dickinson)*

The Community in which I have lived for the past nineteen years is very special - not because of any of the individuals present, not because it is in Pakistan with all its stress and attendant problems, and not because of the high profile we sometimes have abroad. It is special because the primary focus of the group over the years has been on Community. The aim has been to live out in some haphazard and risky way the solidarity, fraternity and equality that we have glimpsed in the life of a Mediterranean peasant - Jesus.

A community that is home

The Spiritan community in Pakistan is home for me. It has been since 1977 and will continue to be so for, at least, the next couple of years. I have made my contribution to the life of this group on the edge of the desert and I've received faith, strength and life in return. But community is more than a mere bartering of personal gifts and services with the hope of receiving an equal share in return. It is an opening up of the vulnerable corners of one's soul in the presence of trusted companions. In such an atmosphere we bring the shadow side of our personalities into the light of shared reflection. Something greater than our mere

description of it takes place when we commit ourselves to live in community. We give ourselves over to a lengthy process of transformation which has not been mapped out beforehand. We are ploughing furrows in the sand.

Demands made on the community

Let me get away from this introspection, lest we get stuck with one more inaccurate label about what we do in Pakistan. All the members of our group have no difficulty in being busy. Despite deliberate efforts at a policy of *DO LESS*, we seem to end up with a bigger workload than ever. Everyone has several caps to wear and the contribution of the group goes beyond the people and parish boundaries where we perform our main duties. While having a sure focus on where we are going and what we are about, we try to be open to the needs of others and open ourselves to the movements for change and movements of the Spirit in other corners of the country. The effort and time required for all of this leads to an enrichment both at the individual and communal level.

The reason for us being in Pakistan is to work for the evangelisation of the Marwaris. This is what defines our presence, prescribes our work and forms our life as a group. The Marwaris are poor, for the most part. They live on the edges (physically, religiously and culturally) of an Islamic society. They exist among the lower realms of the outcasts in a caste-ridden culture. Our contact with them challenges us to be conversant with their perspective on life and society, to try to articulate that viewpoint and to engage with them in a search for a more human life.

Evangelisation

And what do we mean when we speak of evangelisation? Each one has his own opinion. In an age of pluralism, dialogue and tolerance, we search for clarity. At a personal level this involves a lot of change. I grew up with one understanding of evangelisation and then the circumstances of my work made me look again at these views. Now, in the silence of my heart, I search for the pearl of great price that I wish to share with others. This involves a lot of listening. Listening to the heartbeat of the universe and to the grass growing. Science and

technology are in the driving seat of a roller-coaster running on empty. Miniature computers based on biological material, race-specific chemical weapons, thinking computers and genetic engineering challenge us to question where we are headed. The Gospel has to speak to all of this as well as trying to shed light on questions of identity, fear and conflict that we experience at an individual level. It is necessary to be rooted in our own locale. This can be grinding poverty with no exit for the majority. It can be the corrupt bureaucracy of an uncaring system or the downward spiral of ghetto in-fighting. Not an attractive scene within which to live out one's life. Because of the seeming hopelessness of the situation, we continue to keep faith, promote gentleness and give witness to the fact that the struggle must go on. In all situations of our lives, we seek to incarnate the compassionate spirit of Jesus. Our task is exploration into God. Our life is to live in the mystery of God's love and our aim is to awaken the divine within.

The activity of reflection

Analysis does not mean paralysis. The activity of reflection is a constant feature of our work and lives. Reflection, on the structural reasons for poverty, on internalised oppression, on the forces and pressures that circumscribe our lives, on how to work with the poor in a worthwhile way, on how to survive in a strange place - these are the themes and many more that occupy us on a daily basis. They are not topics for debate that we might pick up in our spare time; rather, they are the bread and butter of our lives and we are existentially involved in deepening our understanding of them so that we might be more effective in our service. The situation we are in cries out for a response so our involvement is very much a "*hands on*" approach. It would be easy to get into work that we find more personally rewarding, individual projects or work in a very structured environment - all of those options seem like the easy way out in a difficult situation. Analysing the situation and our response to it on a regular basis means we develop skills in the art of balancing.

The difficulties and frustrations of our community living

It is not possible to talk about community without mentioning the difficulties and frustrations. There are many fissures in our lives. We are outsiders trying to swim in a very different cultural ocean. We need to make adjustments at a personal and communal level if we are to insert ourselves in a meaningful way. This leads to a destabilising of our equilibrium, which also has to be coped with. At the same time, we have to be faithful to the need to nourish our wellsprings. Often we are at a different stage from the people with whom we work in relation to personal development, freedom and responsibility, and individual needs. These differences need to be recognised, acknowledged and nurtured. We cannot stick our heads in the sand when it comes to feelings and emotions. At an individual level, we have different personalities and an array of skills, talents and capabilities. By respectful listening and gentle inquiry, we attempt to combine individual initiative and team work. There is tremendous strength, bonding and mutual support in such an approach.

A new experience of community

My experience of community in Pakistan is at variance with what I have experienced in other places. Being superior or parish priest cuts no ice. Each person gets an equal opportunity to give his opinion. It is valued in its own right and decisions are arrived at from the communal pool of reflection. Security, solidarity and significance have been the hallmarks of our attempts to share a common life over the years. These are values that we negotiate, nurture and promote through our own efforts. We invest time and energy in trying to resolve the misunderstandings, disagreements and conflicts that arise in any situation where people are trying to live and work together. We have sustained ourselves by drinking from our own wells. Our experiences, feelings and reflections have been freely shared. In doing so, we have expanded our vision, broken down a few barriers and opened new avenues of hope.

The search for justice and peace

Working for Justice and Peace has been a passionate enterprise for the group over the years. Compassionate concern for individuals is the preoccupation of some while others are involved in meetings, seminars and training programmes with local people. Daily contact with poor people and their struggle keeps us from losing sight of the tragedy, fear and injustice that is an everyday event for many. Promoting these values makes big demands on everybody. It is important to be in contact with other individuals and groups that are similarly motivated. We have few illusions about how little we have achieved, and experience has taught us not to seek the impossible. Yet we are totally convinced that individual conversion is simply not enough. We must work tirelessly for the formation of communities that give living witness to these values of Justice and Peace.

A dialogue of faith

Pakistan has a different faith and culture from Ireland where I grew up. It takes time to adjust to the new surroundings. I think we accustom ourselves in a physical way to these circumstances without ever feeling at home psychologically. We engage in dialogue of sorts with the culture but we are not part of a dialogue of faith with the majority religion. None of us has given much time to this topic and we don't see such a venture as our main task. It is very challenging to live in such a situation. What does my faith mean in this milieu? How am I to give witness to my faith here? How can I discuss my faith in this setting? My own limited experience has taught me that I must seek to discover what we share in common. Look for the areas where our lives crisscross. Begin at a basic level and allow human friendship to be the context within which sincere and meaningful conversation can take place. After all, dialogue at the level of life must be possible.

Afraid of love?

To talk about community and not mention love would be only telling half the story. As an all male group, we seldom mention this four-letter word. Are we afraid of what such a discussion might involve or do we

consider such topics too mushy for us? A bit of both maybe. There are other reasons. We like to walk the walk before we talk the talk. Is love an action rather than a coffee time topic of conversation? It is difficult to find suitable words to talk about love. As Emily Dickinson says:

*“That love is all there is,
Is all we know of love,
It is enough, the freight should be
Proportioned to the groove”.*

*Eddie Flynn,
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“You have a clever way of rejecting God’s law in order to uphold your own teaching. For Moses commanded, “Respect your father and your mother”, and “whosoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death”, But you teach that if a person has something he could use to help his father or mother, but says, “This is Cor-ban” (which means, it belongs to God), he is excused from helping his father or mother. In this way the teaching you pass on to others cancels out the word of God. And there are many other things like this that you do”. (Mark 7/9-13)

AFRICAN SPIRITAN: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY AND SRL

Relations with the Extended Family

by Jeronimo Cahinga

Jeronimo Cahinga, former provincial superior of Angola, is now in Rome, writing a thesis on biblical theology in the Gregorian University. Here he tackles a problem that is rarely mentioned but which can be crucial in the lives of African religious.

The title might seem to lack unity and logic, but in reality this is not so. It is a question of singling out certain challenges that an African Spiritan might have to face as a religious and missionary, having to relate to

- his *community*, whose members belong to different cultures,
- his *family*, which still considers him an indispensable member for the solution of many of its problems, and
- the *Rule of Life*, which tells him that “*in witnessing to poverty we place ourselves in the hands of Divine Providence, accepting cultural uprooting and the degree of separation from our family that is entailed. We accept even that insecurity our apostolic activities might impose.*” (SRL 70.2)

A question posed by Lucas Tilisho

In his article, “*An African Missionary in Africa*”¹, Lucas Tilisho is clearly preoccupied by a real contemporary problem that could affect, or is already affecting, the way many African Spiritans live their community and apostolic life. He makes the point that if the relations and the solidarity that exist among members of the extended family are a definite value, they can, on the other hand, present a challenge to our vocation as religious missionaries². He shows how it is taken for granted that the relations between members of the extended family include the obligation to help one another; the fact that one is a

religious missionary changes nothing in this respect³.

No Spiritan in such a situation, which includes myself and many others, can avoid facing up to this problem. As Lucas points out, we African Spiritans are under a whole array of pressures, to the extent that not only are we unable to change the way our families think, but we constantly find *"our duty conflicting with demands or pressures from outside"*⁴.

My objective in this article

I share wholeheartedly this preoccupation of Tilisho. So why another article on the subject? My aim is not to repeat what has already been said but to deepen the reflection on it and try to find the beginnings of a solution.

Let us first look at **two of the crucial sayings of Jesus** to those who wanted to follow him in a special way:

"Go, sell ... and then come and follow me" (Mark 10, 21s).

I wonder, if the example given in the Synoptic Gospels of the call made by Jesus to the rich young man (Mk. 10, 17-27; Mt. 19,16-26; Lk. 18,18-27) and presented by the Church for centuries as a model of the religious vocation, makes the same impact on a young African today who feels himself or herself called from within a milieu which is really poor. This does not seem to be the great Gospel challenge for the young African. The reason is simple: if the heart of this call is: *"go, sell all you possess, give the money to the poor... then come and follow me"*, this call to those coming from a situation of extreme poverty sounds strange, incomprehensible, hollow. They have no goods to sell and they need money if they want to enter the seminary or the convent.

The critical and fragile socio-political situation into which the African continent is plunged, the hunger, the misery and the sub-human conditions, make the term *"poverty"* sound very negative to African ears - hardly a term where one could discover an ideal. Pope John Paul II describes the situation vividly: *"In a world controlled by rich and powerful nations, Africa has practically become an irrelevant appendix, often forgotten and neglected...Africa is a continent where*

*countless human beings – men and women, children and young people – are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalised and abandoned”*⁵

It is certain that the spirit of poverty in the Gospels is one of the chief signs of being ready and willing to follow Jesus. Christ himself says that the Good News is for the poor and they are the ones he declares blessed (Lk. 6, 20-21; Mt. 5, 3-6). But Jesus calls the poor *"blessed"* because they are the privileged objects of the saving grace which he came to offer to the world; at the same time he offers them the possibility of freeing themselves from their sorry lot and of recovering their lost dignity. He does not call them *"blessed"* because he feels it would be better for them to continue in their poverty. But in Africa, this liberation is not even on the horizon, at least not in this millennium.

"Whoever comes to me without hating father or mother ... cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14,26)

If the same call of Jesus comes to the young African as demanding not only that he leave but even "hate" the whole family, the impact on that young person becomes deeper and must involve him more completely. He or she will need time to reflect more seriously on what is at stake before making the decision to follow Jesus in those conditions, even when gifted with a great capacity for generous self-giving.

The links between members of the African Family

In my opinion, the importance of the family and the influence it has on the African is so great that before admitting any candidate into a religious community there ought to be a dialogue with him and his family. Why do I say this? We all belong to a nuclear family of mother, father, brothers and sisters. But in some cultures, like my own, other relations, such as grandparents and maternal uncles, have a fundamental role to play in the life of the child and even the adult. It is their task (especially that of the grandparents) to name the newborn child. It is they who set down the rules as to how the grandchildren should be brought up. On nearly every problem they have to be consulted. Our family covers all relatives, near and distant. Even the dead still belong to the family. Then there is the village community, which has a large

part to play in the life of the family. It joins it in any celebration and is present at its different activities. It has its role to play in the all-round education of the child.

This is how a whole series of vital links is built up, making it very difficult for an African rooted in such a culture to *"extricate himself from collateral relationships, which constantly remind him that he too is at the same time the brother, the cousin, the nephew, the uncle... Whether we want it or not, as Africans we are part of a network of family solidarity which makes us all responsible in our society. And so our happiness and unhappiness are lived out equally with all those who are related to us... It is taken for granted that we must share something of our very life and, indeed, of what we possess, with them. This is an unspoken pact which cannot be broken"*.⁶

Therefore all family members find it perfectly normal and within their rights to seek advice or assistance from the priest, hoping that he will spend a little of his time listening to their problems or other sufferings that torment them or the family as a whole.

Intercultural apostolic community and relations with the extended family

So far, I do not see why the situation of an African Spiritan in relation to his extended family should cause conflicts in his community, even when it is made up of members from different cultures. It is my experience as a missionary that the African seeks advice from the priest without establishing first whether he is from his family or race or tribe, as long he finds in him someone who is open, values him and does not constantly repeat *"I've no time"* or *"I've something else to do."* In this way, if the community does not become closed in upon itself through prejudice, it can even help the African confrere to solve common family problems.

There need not be any conflict, but rather harmonization between the missionary program of the community and the time given to listening to people's problems, whether they be relatives or not. In the words of John Paul II, *"the communities of Religious Institutes and of Societies*

of Apostolic Life can offer concrete and effective cultural proposals when they give witness to the evangelical way of practising mutual acceptance in diversity and of exercising authority, and when they give an example of sharing material and spiritual goods, of being truly international...and of listening to the men and women of our time".⁷

If the African Spiritan is left to himself to face the problems of the family members who come to him, then he will try to provide a solution without the community or perhaps even contrary to its rules. And this would be a sure way to produce much conflict.

The heart of the question

The real heart of the question is reached when the family begins to need concrete material help, especially money, because it has fallen into dire poverty. In fact, situations brought about by war or bad government and corruption, as happens in my own country and in many others, have thrown whole families into utter destitution.

The bringing up of children, their health, their education, is the joint work of uncles and aunts, brothers and cousins. In other words, all the active members of the family are expected to sacrifice themselves and their property to this effect. It is a question of the future of the family group.

At this point there arises a serious and controversial question. The family member who is a priest or religious is seen as the privileged one, the elite of the family, at times the only one who has done further studies and has a clear social status. In the eyes of our families, we are rich. And to be honest, at times we show few signs of poverty, whether materially (house, cars, food, clothing etc.), or intellectually, or in the social position we achieve, the security we have and the ecclesiastical protection we are afforded.

So the family of the African Spiritan quite naturally turns its eyes to him as the only person capable of coming to the rescue of the rest of the members. His refusal to help would be seen as nothing less than cynicism, indifference or insensitivity to the suffering of those who brought him up.⁸

HOW SHOULD THE PROBLEM BE TACKLED?

A transitory situation

I am convinced that the condition of beggars to which many of our families have been reduced is temporary. It is linked to the present crisis in which many African countries find themselves today; it is not a cultural question or something inherent in the African tradition. Certainly it is not destined to continue indefinitely.

We all know that the Africans are truly generous. When they have what they need they do not go asking from anyone. Quite the opposite; to the missionary who comes among them they offer what he needs, and they even provide for their relative who is a priest or religious when they know he is in want.

At present, however, there is a crisis. And it would be irresponsible on our part as Africans, rooted as we are in deep solidarity with our family, to ignore it, deny it, or try to hide it through shame or through an inferiority complex from our confreres who do not have this type of problem. To be poor is not a moral fault: in most cases, it is to be a victim of human injustice.

A question of conscience

But, faced with the precarious situation of our families, an acute question of conscience arises: must it be that our obligations to our impoverished family (the poor here being our own mother, father, brothers, sisters) cease once we have made vows, or that our links with our relatives must disappear because of our religious profession?

It is a constant worry that never leaves us, especially when we are far away on mission, aware that we have left them to themselves without even the basic necessities. What makes matters worse is when we are sometimes asked by a confrere in the community (perhaps through curiosity), *"How do you harmonise the SRL with your obligations to help your extended family when the Rule does not even foresee such a case?"*.

But I would feel even more hurt if I were to interpret such a question as

meaning: *“African confreres, this is your problem! I’m OK, we’re OK!”*. But such is not the case and so, in the present circumstances, we are counting on the affective and effective solidarity of our confreres in community.

A way towards a solution

It is true that SRL does not deal directly with this type of problem. But in underlining, with such determination and clarity, the necessity of solidarity as one of the elements of our religious and missionary poverty, does the Rule of Life intend to exclude such cases as these? *“When budgets are being drawn up, at whatever level, account should be taken of the needs that there are beyond the borders of our community or our circumscription or even outside the Congregation. This is a means by which we give proof of our poverty and of our solidarity with those who are in need”*. (SRL 72.4) I think that where the circumstances demand it, the relatives of Spiritans in difficult economic and material situations could be included among *“those who are in need”*. This would be a sign of real community solidarity and would perhaps help to give a sounder dimension to the relationship between an African Spiritan and his family and open a way for more constructive dialogue with the community on this subject. Now is the time, while Spiritan vocations are still on the increase in Africa, to face up squarely to this problem, at least at the level of our communities or even our circumscriptions.

If there is a blank refusal to discuss the matter or to look for a solution, based on the usual and seemingly irrefutable reasons of *‘absolute and total detachment from everything’*, the African will use his wits and his lively imagination to find a solution, even if it means getting round the rules or simply ignoring them. He will keep trying to put more money aside, to be used for his family, thus calling into question and discrediting his vow of poverty. This would make his position with the family even more difficult as they would end up concluding that he is able to give because he always has something to give.

I do not believe that the Congregation would want to see its African members slide into this confused and underhand way of living religious

life. In the words of Semporé, Religious Institutes that propose as an ideal "that one should declare "CORBAN" all the possessions, the power and the knowledge with which the young African religious ought to assist his family, in order to dedicate himself body and soul to his new family, will contribute towards making religious life a pious misunderstanding".⁹

Jeronimo Cahinga CSSp.

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¹ TILISHO, *Spiritan Life* no. 7 (1997) pp. 46-47

² TILISHO, *ibid.* p.46

³ TILISHO, *ibid.* p. 46-47

⁴ TILISHO, *ibid.* p. 47

⁵ "Ecclesia in Africa", nos. 40, 41.

⁶ SEMPORÉ: from "Vida Religiosa em Africa", 1988 p. 62.

⁷ "Vita Consecrata" no. 80

⁸ This idea of African family solidarity is well expressed in an article in "TELEMA" (1998, p.27):

"The African finds his help and insurance in the solidarity of the family... So whoever you are, and wherever you are, when a call is heard for help in the family, it resonates in the very core of the being of its members. Whether you want to or not, in one way or the other you will be affected. You would have to have a heart made of stone to remain indifferent. You feel you simply have no choice".

⁹ SEMPORÉ, *Art. Cit.* p.63.

OPENING THE DOORS

By Mark Connolly

Mark Connolly of the English Province was appointed to Makurdi District in Nigeria in 1968. In 1992, he was recalled to work in the Province in youth/vocations work. With shrinking numbers in an aging Province, his experience has led him to see the need for a different view of community life which will be no longer exclusively Spiritan. Recently, he has been appointed Provincial Bursar of the Province.

As a young man I joined the Congregation because I wanted to be a priest. I wanted to say Mass for people, baptize and officiate at weddings. I wanted to minister to the sick and bury the dead. I wanted to be that member of the community who was held in great respect and was seen as a man of God because I was committed to a life of prayer, self dedication and service to the community. But as a priest I did not feel I was called to serve in my own community. I wanted to be a priest in Africa and joining the Congregation of the Holy Ghost would make that possible. Ordained in 1968 I finally set off for Nigeria.

A changing view of Church and priesthood

When a changing world as well as a new vision presented by the Vatican Council necessitated a reappraisal of the living out of that priesthood in the Church many of us found ourselves undergoing processes of renewal not just through programs and courses but also through a call to conversion through prayer and a better appreciation of the Kingdom in our midst. Our comfortable notions of Church in all its facets had to be challenged, not least in what was the nature of the Church and who was identified with it. That the presence of the priesthood was an integral part of the Church was unquestionable; that it should be elevated on to a clerical plane and shrouded in an unapproachable cloud would have to be challenged.

The Church in Nigeria and the people with whom I lived and worked taught me so much about what it means to be a priest. The Congregation, despite its clerical status and its weighted bias to priestly ministry,

has enabled me to be more conscious of the potential for evangelisation in our commitment as professed religious *with its strong emphasis on community living*.

A treasure to be shared

The ideals, traditions and spirit of Spiritan Life are a treasure not just for those who make religious profession but for the many people who have come to be associated with the Congregation as zealators, benefactors, associates and co-operators. In the years since my return from Africa I have discovered in these people a tremendous force for evangelisation in our society as well as a personal source of affirmation and support.

I am very fortunate to belong to a Province where there are others who share these same ideals and vision. A ministry to young people, collaborative ministry with committed associates and a determination to keep moving to the periphery of society have ensured that within the Province we are continually trying to make the Church relevant to the lives of ordinary people. *This has involved opening the doors of our communities to ensure that our hearts and minds are open as well.*

Behind these doors there lies a wealth of resources - accommodation, technical facilities and a treasury of books and media aids to help promote the spread of the Gospel. Most precious of all is the space for prayer and worship and the rhythm and *Rule of Life* which is the fruit of the lived experience of our founding fathers and brothers who committed their lives to the service of the Gospel. *These gifts are not for us alone.* While I appreciate that there are risks involved and we make ourselves very vulnerable by opening the doors, charity and our apostolic commitment require us to share these gifts with those who work for the establishment of the Kingdom here on earth.

Come and see

All this has become increasingly clear to me since I returned from Africa. On my reappointment to the Province in 1992 I was assigned to our community in Manchester which had the primary task of serving as a vocation-ministry community. Following the example of Jesus, the

confrères there used the same approach as Jesus in their ministry: *'Come and see where I live'*. They invited young men to share their daily life with them and assisted them in a process of vocation discernment. With one group of young people inside the door it was not long before other groups were there as well - parents, local priests, collaborators in youth ministry.

When I was transferred to our house at Carfin in Scotland, I became even more confirmed in my opinion that the houses of the Congregation will never become Spiritan communities while we retain the notion that such communities can only be valid where there are professed Spiritans living together. On many occasions, I have found myself to be the only professed Spiritan in the community. Spiritan community life of a vibrant and dynamic kind flourished in Salford and I miss being part of it. Moving to Carfin promised the same experience. But with the core of the community, both professed and lay, moving on, we are once again looking for ways of establishing new forms of community living here in Carfin.

A widening community

Some strands of community life still exist, thank God. The faithful staff who cater for the day to day functioning of the house, property and administrative needs of the community are themselves Spiritans in a very real way because they share in our ideals and apostolic endeavours. And there are our faithful friends who do so much work in the Charity Shop every Tuesday. With them are the stalwarts of the house committee who get together to organize fund raising events, particularly the garden fete.

In many respects, the youth groups form the most important strands of community life. Their presence in our communities challenges our attitudes and life styles as well as offering us a hope that something of the Spiritan way of life has meaning for a future generation who will form the nucleus of the Church. I have found the present generation of young people very sensitive to older people's attitudes and reactions towards them. Any sign of judgementalism or inhospitableness easily alienates them. A very good litmus-test of our progress in this impor-

tant area of life is to gauge the frequency with which a genuine cross-section of young people from all kinds of background are to be found not only in our chapels but also at our dining tables.

A view of the future

If the mission of the Congregation is to be revitalized and continue to flourish in England and Scotland, it must draw on the tremendous resources of support and good will that already exist here in the communities. I sometimes describe the present core of the community, depending so much on professed membership, like that of the black hole discovered by the astronomers; collapsing in on itself and swallowing up energy without radiating light.

We live in hope that professed Spiritans from other Provinces and continents will be available to help us carry on the “mission” in England and Scotland. But I am more and more convinced that our large houses should be filled with people, not necessarily sharing our profession of life, but nevertheless sharing our ideals, traditions and commitment and they should be invited in to live and work with us.

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“Clericalism is an obstacle to any kind of collaborative ministry. Attention should be focused on the eradication of this form of domination in both initial and on-going Formation”.

- 1998 General Chapter, Maynooth 5.15

OUR FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY – a personal reflection

By Rogath Kimaryo

One of the members of the new General Council, Rogath Kimaryo of the East African Province, gives his personal view of community life in the light of the ideas and experiences related in the other articles.

Introduction

I would like to begin my reflection with the twofold question, which Jesus asked his disciples: “*Who do people say that the Son of man is?*” and “*Who do you say that I am?*” (Mt. 16:13ff). Peter’s answer, “*You are the Son of the living God,*” reveals Jesus’ identity and mission. I am just wondering whether these are not the same kind of questions which most of us ask silently through our lives and activities as missionaries? Do we not all wonder, from time to time, what people think of us and what we are up to? This suggests that most “*Clericalism is an obstacle to any kind of collaborative ministry. Attention should be focused on the eradication of this form of domination in both initial and on-going Formation*”

- Maynooth 5.15 people want to know what the others (society) think of them so that they may either adjust or appreciate better what they are, to confirm their abilities and personal gifts. So, just as teachers are able to identify and appraise certain outstanding gifts portrayed by their students, so is society in general. Society is able to recognise certain qualities, which may be portrayed by certain individuals or groups and appraise them as exemplary.

One such gift is the living of our fraternal life in community. Usually, we who are used to living it may not appraise it as a gift. but other people (non-Spiritans) are able to see it and confirm it so. How many times for instance I have heard people remarking, “*You Spiritans are really fortunate*”; “*I envy you*”; “*your communities are so good, friendly, simple and so generous*”. The fact is, very often, we are not

even aware of that fact and the impact our community living has on others. But, I find those remarks very inspiring and encouraging. They are quite challenging at the same time, especially when we consider our weaknesses and the difficulties related to living a truly fraternal community life as is expressed by our confreres in the articles of this edition of *Spiritan Life*.

Reflecting on the articles, regardless of their origin – whether from a students' community, or a working community or even a retired one – the message that is conveyed is very clear and simple. Firstly, community living is part and parcel of our Spiritan tradition. Secondly, we all need one another in realising our vocation and our common mission. Thirdly, it constitutes an apostolate in itself. Fourthly, it is never a simple task. Fifthly, conversion is a key for community building.

Community as a family

There seems to be a consensus in these articles that community life is essential for realising our spiritan charism, and that it should also be a place where each Spiritan feels at home as in a family. A family gives one a sense of belonging, a place where one feels free, loved, accepted, secure and joyful. In a family, nuclear or extended, there is a spontaneous spirit of love among the family members. Thus, we are called to make our communities like “family homes” where each one is important for what he is, whether young or old, in health or in sickness (SRL 34). In any family, relationships play a very important role. The family members relate freely. They feel accepted, loved and supported. In the same way, a Spiritan family should be a privileged place of personal relationship with one another where we practise the Gospel of love. Despite its shortcomings, a confrere said “la communauté est le lieu privilégié d'un cheminement de foi; elle permet un partage, et elle est bien souvent une véritable source de joie”.

One Heart and One Soul

The living of Spiritan community life is not based on fulfilling certain rules or regulations. It is not even a question of breaking or not breaking those rules. In any case, our Rule of Life has an entire chapter on “community life”. Those regulations sum up what we already

cherish as our way of life. It is not something that is imposed on us but rather a personal conviction that springs from our hearts, based on our founders' teachings and on the Christian Gospel of love. It is based on the love that bound together the early Christian disciples who were united in "*one heart and one soul*" (Acts 4.32). In his testimony about community life, one confrere concludes that "*not mentioning love when talking about community, would be only telling half the story*". The full story has to be told by each and all of us, by our own lives as we willingly live our consecration in the pursuit of Love. As a faith-community, we feel that our ministry is above all the ministry of transmitting love to the world; a world that has different value systems and divided by wars, conflicts, individualism and indifferences.

We realise that fraternal living in community is an activity of the Spirit and the heart. Thus, it is not purely a human construction: it is rather an activity of the Spirit who operates in us and through us. It is also an activity of the heart. It is a life, which each one of us is called to embrace freely. One has to like it. It is based on love for one another.

Community Living as an Art

Just as artists use their skills, time, and dedication in order to produce a worthy artistic object, so is the building up of our community life. Artists work tirelessly, spending several hours on the same thing. They do it again and again, without counting the cost. Their intention is to produce a product, which is as perfect as possible. Artists strive for perfection. I suppose this should be a challenge for us Spiritans. Our community living needs to be continually worked at, in order to create a favourable situation of mutual trust, friendship, and respect for one another. The general Chapter of Maynooth warned that: "*Structures can be empty and lifeless unless there is a genuine personal effort of each confrere to live with the other*". It is something we must always strive for by trying it again and again. This is in line with the inspiring speech of President Mary McAleese of Ireland when she addressed us during the Chapter. Talking about the dramatic changes that have taken place in Northern Ireland vis-à-vis the prospects of peace, she said that "*we must never give up hope*". Peace presupposes a certain amount of understanding. We should always talk and talk again. Any change will

come from a willingness to talk and to listen to the other. In the same way, a truly fraternal community is one which is disposed to talking and listening and has the ability to accept changes.

Challenges and temptations

1 *Over-concern with works*

For an institute like ours, which was founded primarily for the evangelisation of the poor and abandoned, social activities become part and parcel of our work of evangelisation. In regions of first evangelisation, the missionary becomes a Jack-of-all-trades. He is not only a preacher but also a builder, teacher, etc. His obvious temptation is to see only things and projects to be accomplished. Community life could be seen as something secondary and unimportant. Aspects like community table-fellowship, prayers, discernment and fraternal support are perceived as things that slow down the motion of development. Thus, *“to be in community is felt as an obstacle for the mission, almost a waste of time...”* (Pro-Anima 2000, No. 01 Oct. 98).

During his lifetime, Libermann had already noticed the same tendency in some of his missionaries. They were over-concerned with works to be done and had no time for themselves and their fellow missionaries. He saw exactly the danger we are experiencing in the Congregation today. Statistics show that only about 70% of Spiritans live in community. The rest live alone. We realise that that kind of situation is not healthy. It is not even in line with our Spiritan tradition where community living is an essential element in realising our vocation (SRL, 28). The Maynooth Chapter had *“Our living together”* as one of its four strands. It was evident during the discussions that community life is more than living under the same roof. Needless to say, confreres living under the same roof can be more distant from one another than confreres living miles apart. Whether it be “under the same roof” or “extended”, we are all called to community life and we see it as a privileged means for realising our Spiritan vocation. Addressing all Spiritans about what happened at Maynooth, the Superior General wrote this regarding community life; *“If we who have the motto of “one heart and one soul” are sometimes living alone, we do not see it so*

so much as a fault but rather as something important that we are missing. We once again underlined the benefits and joys that come from life lived in common with our brothers". About 150 years ago, Libermann wrote this same vital message to his missionaries. He exhorted them to see the value of community living in the missions. The opposite would cause harm to themselves and to others, especially if they put an exaggerated emphasis on their works. Could we say that community life was "Libermann's dream" that has proved to be too difficult for Spiritans?

2 *Blood is thicker than water?*

When talking about family ties, we have often heard people saying, "*Blood is thicker than water*". It suggests that family ties are stronger than any kind of relationship. This is to say that there is hardly any relationship that can replace blood relationship. I suppose this is true with every culture be it African, European, American or Asian. A religious community on the other hand, is a faith-family, bringing together people of different bloods, from different backgrounds and cultures into what is evidently, a "constructed family". The ties and feelings are not exactly the same as natural family ties. So the question which could be asked is how do we, as religious, relate to our natural families, without jeopardising the uniqueness of our religious calling? Responding to this question is even more difficult when asked of African confreres, because of the special situation in Africa where members of the extended family, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, are all considered part and parcel of one's family. It is natural for African confreres to ask how they should relate to their extended families. One confrere writes, "*Therefore all family members find it perfectly normal and within their rights to seek advice or assistance.... The real heart of the question is reached when the family begins to ask for concrete material help especially money, because it has fallen into dire poverty*". How can a confrere, who is supposed to have professed religious poverty like all Spiritans, respond to this problem of material need? After all, society has already classified him as "*the privileged one, the elite of the family, at times*

the only one who has done further studies and has a clear social status.... Refusal to help would be seen as cynicism, indifference or lack of sensitivity to the suffering of those who brought him up”.

3 Bread-winners?

The experience of the confrere cited above echoes a deep, underlying question which is being asked by almost every African confrere. It would be foolish to pretend that there is no such problem. I think the best way of solving the problem is to talk about it openly in chapters and other meetings. The solution has to come from the circumscription or the local community where a confrere is living (SRL 72.4).

It is unrealistic to create an impression that all African societies are exactly the same and that all our family backgrounds are identical. They are not. Hence there is no one simple solution that is valid for every region and, much less, for every case.

The other danger is for us to be considered bread-winners by our families. In doing so, we are liable to create a dependent syndrome where the family looks to the confrere as the main provider. As an African religious missionary, I see my role more as one of empowering and liberating, rather than that of being a direct bread-winner for my family (apart from extreme situations). Education is the best instrument for enabling and setting one free. I therefore see our involvement with our families in terms of enabling them to acquire education so that they may find ways of providing bread for themselves. As Spiritans, we are called to announce the empowering and liberating good news to all people, including our blood relatives.

The Spirit of Maynooth

The articles do not make explicit reference to the spirit of Maynooth Chapter and its call for renewal of community living. So, the question that each one of us and every community should ask is how are we disposed to live our fraternity today with the renewed spirit of the Maynooth Chapter?

I have already stated above that community life, where it is truly lived,

lived, not only gives us strength to carry out our apostolate but also becomes a way of evangelization; an evident and a powerful way of evangelization, especially where members of the community are of different age and nationality. This is already evident in our international communities. One confrere from such a community writes, *“the internationality of the group was more than an accidental throwing together of different nationalities.... Our internationality turned into an asset to our work of preaching the Gospel.”* It is for this reason that the Maynooth Chapter reiterated our option of 1976 for international communities.

Conclusion

Acknowledging our fragility

One confrere says in his article that *“It is not possible to talk about community without mentioning the difficulties and frustrations... ”*. Indeed, at times it passes through moments of sorrow and moments of joy (SRL, 39.2). I think this is normal and we should not pretend to say that everything is OK all the time. We are *earthen vessels* and quite fragile. Like any fragile object, our community living is liable to break unless great care is taken to handle it carefully. We have to *“invest time and energy in trying to resolve the misunderstanding, disagreements and conflicts that arise, breaking of barriers and open new avenues of hope.”* Each member has to feel responsible for the well being of the community and play his part. One has to be sensitive even to those little acts and gestures that make a community human and divine at the same time.

Silent preaching

Often, as religious missionaries, we need to come together and discuss how best to carry out our work of evangelisation. Sometimes we come-up with sophisticated methods. Seldom, however, do we see our community living and ourselves as a form of evangelisation. And yet it remains the indispensable and best method of preaching the word of God. *“It is necessary to remind all that in itself, a fraternal community is already an apostolate, it contributes directly to the work of*

of evangelization....” (Pro-anima, 4). It will undoubtedly have a lasting and far-reaching impact on the people we mission to and among whom we live. Hence a good community is already a practical preaching of the Gospel, and gives credibility to our preaching by word of mouth. Perhaps it is good to remind ourselves of the powerful words of Pope Paul VI when he spoke of evangelisation in modern times: *“Modern man is not so much interested in teachers as in witnesses, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”* (EN, 41).

« In a Christian community, everything depends on whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable. A community which allows some of its members to be unemployed will perish because of them. It will be well, therefore, if every member receives a definite task to perform for the community, that he may know in hours of doubt that, he too, is not useless and unusable. Every Christian community must realise that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship »

Dietrich Bonhoeffer : *“Life Together”*, 1976).

The Cover

The triangle represents the Trinity, the sacrament of the Eucharist, our dedication to the Holy Trinity. The four circles represent Mary who became the Mother of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The four circles also represent the four seasons of the year. The four circles also represent the four elements of the universe: earth, water, air, and fire. The four circles also represent the four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west. The four circles also represent the four corners of the world. The four circles also represent the four winds of heaven. The four circles also represent the four seasons of the year. The four circles also represent the four elements of the universe: earth, water, air, and fire. The four circles also represent the four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west. The four circles also represent the four corners of the world. The four circles also represent the four winds of heaven.



Finito di stampare
nel mese di marzo 1999
dalla
Scuola Tipografica S. Pio X
Via degli Etruschi, 7
00185 Roma

Spanish Life is published in English, French and Portuguese

Next Issue: "Procession and Solidarity"

The Cover

The triangle represents the Trinity: it is coloured red to accentuate our dedication to the Holy Spirit. The blue circle signifies Mary who became the mother of Jesus through the Holy Spirit; therefore one of the points of the triangle cuts the circle. The green path represents hope. Thus the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, under the protection of Mary, is travelling along the path of hope and trust.

Spiritan Life is published in English, French and Portuguese.

Next Issue: "Presence and Solidarity"

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